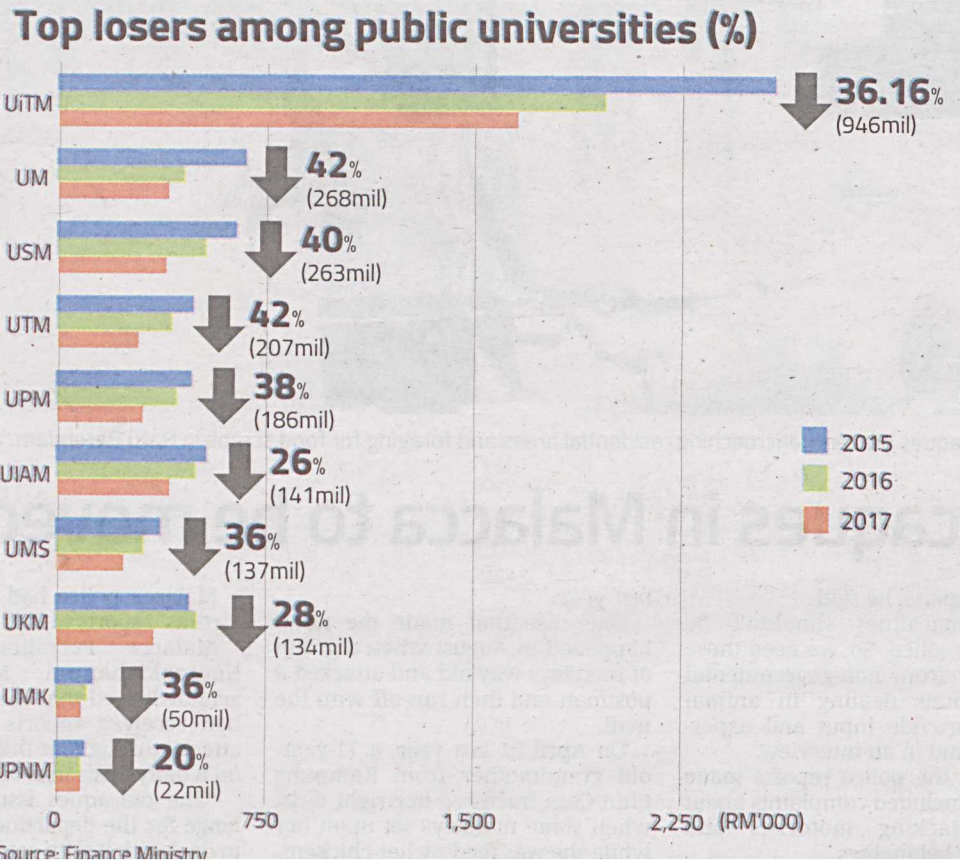


University about to lose its lustre as a prestigious research facility

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KUALA LUMPUR: With research funds slashed, Universiti Malaysia could risk slipping from its reputation as the country's most prestigious research university.

In the past year, UM had improved its position in the QS University Ranking, climbing upwards from 29 to 27 among Asian universities.

But with a slash of RM174mil in funds last year, which led to UM getting only RM463mil, the university now faces a further 20% cut this year. This has led to speculation on how the massive budget cuts could affect its performance this year.

Earlier, *The Star* reported that the university spent RM100mil in 2015 on research, around one-sixth of its total allocation.

UM deputy Vice-Chancellor/Provost (Academic & International) Prof Awang Bulgiba Awang Mahmud said then that the amount would come up to RM40mil last year, which meant a 60% reduction.

A senior management staff from UM's Faculty of Medicine, who wished to remain anonymous, claimed that "there was no way" the university could retain its rankings this year, let alone rise further.

She said the university was already facing constraints in terms of subsidising university fees, yet they were not allowed to raise school fees. With only RM370mil set aside to the university in 2017, each of UM's 20,000 students would approximately be allocated RM18,500 per year, she added.

"That is, of course, a ridiculously low sum especially for expensive-to-run courses like medicine, dentistry and engineering," she said.

The Government has asked universities to generate 30% of their income but she claimed that this was impossible to do in just two years.

"In most other countries, it is done gradually," she said.

Previously, Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh said that public universities were 80% to 90% dependent on government funding and that this was unsustainable.

He said there were plans in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2020 (Higher Education) for universities to reduce their dependence to 70% by 2020.

Idris also urged public universities to help fund themselves via partnerships with corporate industries.